

21 Stages

The story of my Life in Pictures

The first thirteen years of my life are missing. I'm not sure why my memory is gone, or if it ever formed to begin with. I woke up a stranger here, a blank, possibly sprung from my world to yours because the brain grows just a little bit more during puberty. This empty past and what has formed from it has brought endless questions, and although some may come to be answered in time, one thing is for sure. Because of it I am forever marked, for I may never see myself as human.

These are my first eleven years on Earth, in 21 stages.



The original title of this section from the first edition. The original file has been lost to time, so I can no longer change the words. Instead it serves as a reminder of how I used to view myself. I've always felt more comfortable relating to myself in machine's terms, but when I wrote this the first time around, I really felt very removed from the human condition. Not so much anymore, but I still don't feel like I'm part of your species.

ECCENTRICITY





I did not yet understand the concept of 'authority' when the High School principal challenged me. After spending the past year absorbing information, I began to use it. I brought him down in less than four months. ➤

Power

You shouldn't take away meat from a starving animal

I think I would have gladly continued to wander along on my own if not for the fact that eventually I would have to deal with the others, and that 'eventually' was February of 1998 when the small pond I was living in expanded a billion-fold with the discovery of the Internet. The first thing on my list to find: Carmen. Six hours gave me an impressive stack of reading material but it wasn't until I found the Forum that the world shifted.

I stumbled upon a forum of others also devoted to Carmen, a few even being semi-nursed by Her presence in their subconscious like I was, and I could talk to them all, so long as I could get online. I had no access from home so I resorted to the school's computers. January gave me one month of my first sense of community. While this was going on the school hired a new principal, Dr. F, who then proceeded to terrorize students and teachers alike.

I remained blissfully unaware of him until one cold day when he saw fit to take me on.

I was informed that by posting on this forum I was breaking school policy and I was kicked off for the rest of the year. So I wrote a letter. After two weeks Dr. F told me that both he and the Superintendent had reviewed my request and denied it. It would have stopped there except that during a random chat with the superintendent (because people in power are fascinating), it was found that the superintendent had never seen the note, and what's more, demanded to see it now. The request was approved and Dr. F was very angry.

I hadn't meant to go over his head, but he didn't see it that way. The next day he pulled me out of class and threatened me should I ever think to go over his head again. It didn't matter to me. I still had the letter of approval.

For two weeks I roamed the Net. On February 11th I met a fellow forumer named Seldavia (Beanie!) from Minnesota who would one day become my wife and the sunshine to my world. Shortly after I met her I was thrown off again by the library assistant. When confronted she gave no answers so I went to the Vice Principal and found that he had heard no

such thing. It was at this point that Dr. F interrupted our closed meeting to announce; a) That he told the assistant to shut me down and b) there wasn't a damn thing I could do about it.

It would have been so easy to write me off as paranoid or a troublemaker, but I guess he was really confident that day. The Vice and I just stared at him, because yes, it really was that unbelievable. Then the Vice decided to help me beat him.

During the final months of my Junior year, students, parents, and teachers fed me information on the tyrant's dealings. There was a movement underground and somehow I had become its figurehead. I was a perfect front, when you think about it. I was easily manipulated, had no fear or concept of authority, was over-emotional, reckless, persistent, and above all, disposable. I was only dimly aware of what the implications could be, nor do I think I would have cared if I had. Bad things were happening, and they must be stopped. Could there be any other way? The consequences of losing were never fully understood, which I suppose is why I took him on in the first place.

But I did know something else, and that was how the humans worked. I had studied their structure, their interfacing, and I knew how to pull the strings.

And in the end, we won.

The full story is far more complicated than what I write here and from it I learned what colouring outside the lines could do to the whole structure. I had achieved Power. Two months later, I achieved internet access through the middle school library, which, as far as I was concerned, was the bigger victory of the two.

Second Edition Notes:

Dr. F was finally caught in October of 2003 and brought up on charges of sexual harassment. He was fired from his post of assistant superintendent of schools in the next county. Hopefully no one will be stupid enough to hire him again, but they probably will.



6 Social Balance

Accepted

I had won them over. After Dr. F's eviction, things changed. Though still incurably out of sync, I was accepted by the school as rebellious. My bizarre self-training made it hard for others to pin me and I was written off as an artistic eccentric that could pull a mean one if needed.

I made my first attempt of being angry at someone and failed miserably. It was a lesson learned and I stopped trusting people as companions though I still loved to watch them as subjects. Actually, at the time I wasn't doing much exploring at all. It was as if I decided that the war had been fought and now it was time to start my life living amongst these beings as one of them. I had achieved the human standard of excellence (so far as I could tell) in so short a time. I might actually have become normal, except for the small matter that...

I wasn't.

One of them. I could finally take my place with the humans. But looks can be deceiving... ➤

ECCENTRICITY



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Re-Entry

The Great Escape

It might have ended there except that I belong to Something Else and whatever That is had decided this had gone on far enough. I think my subconscious must have realized that unless it did something, it was going down with the ship. My dreamless sleep suddenly erupted with colours and visions, violent sensory reproductions and scenarios that forced long forgotten feelings to re-emerge. It took about a week to use the memories of those dreams to rebuild some semblance of a working mind. Moments before I was consumed by the Apathy Crash, I finally came face to face with the hollowed-out shell I had become. I could no longer ignore that I was disintegrating.

In a desperate bid to reverse the damage, I dove back into the world I had abandoned, trying to reclaim the seemingly good life of Social Balance. I ran about trying to keep myself busy, trying to mentally override the Depression, trying to believe that if I wanted it gone bad enough, eventually it would go away. It was a time of bursts of energy, fast-talking and no thinking. If I could just keep out-running it...

And the disease quietly *s p r e a d .*

In the eye of the storm. ➤

I got lucky and somehow dragged myself from the suffocation of the Eternal Gray. I thought I had escaped by consciously deciding to Re-Enter, but toward the end of this era I began to see that I would need medical help once more. I would have to hurry; I was almost out of time. Just because I had eluded one battle hardly meant I would survive the war.

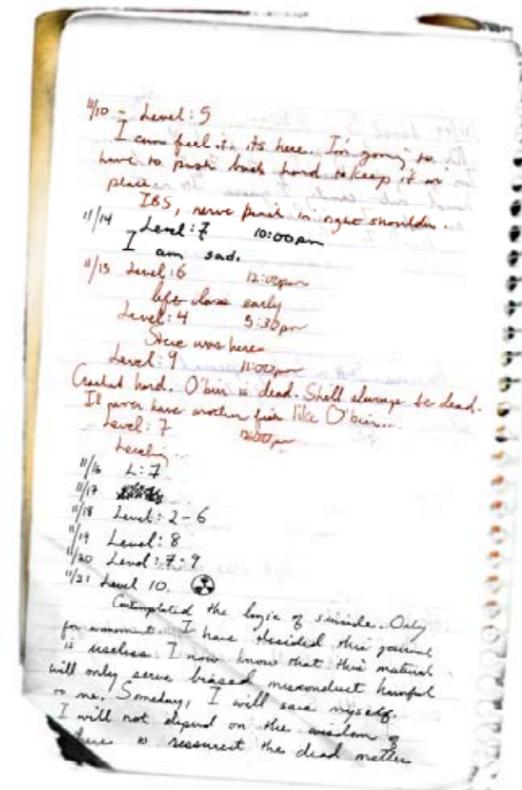
I wouldn't win that easily...

THE FUTURE WITH PROUDLY
ECCENTRICITY





Final Descent
 >>>>> 8.31.2000 >>>>> 12.18.2000



◀ This was a logbook that I kept for about three months to see if there was a pattern. There wasn't. The symptoms were measured in intensity from 1 being calm to 10 being suicidal.

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Final Descent

Everything Falls Apart

The simple fact is you can't will away mental illness any more than you can a headache, and trying to do so only wastes precious time. I wish I knew that then. It wasn't until 8/30/2000 that I hit the wall, marking the first time that suicide went from idle thought to serious consideration. By November, my ability to function day to day was half that of what it was in July. I couldn't control my emotions at all. I was terrified of people, things, ideas, and leaving the house. It was like the scene from 'Clockwork Orange' where

the guy is forced to watch all these things he didn't want to see, didn't have to see. It couldn't be stopped. The cycling thoughts of death and suffering would be there when I went to sleep and there again when I woke up. There was no way to distract it and it was slowly driving me mad. The onset of Winter accelerated the cycling, but I still stayed in college. School was the last thing that connected me to any semblance of structure, but by now I couldn't go unless I called up the school's therapist to talk me out of the house.

I slept at all hours of the day. If I were to describe what it felt like trying to think, I'd say it was trying to drive a car on ice. Every turn and movement, no matter how small, was exaggerated into something huge and dangerous. I was sent to a new therapist for a short while but she wasn't able to get past the obvious fact that I was Eccentric. After that, I suppose they figured me cured.

There was no stopping the inevitable.

◀ Every passing day I could feel it all just peeling away as I fell, each day faster and farther. All my code dissolved and my consciousness burned away in the Final Descent.

ECCENTRICITY

arrival
2.06.2001 ----- and on into the light

free. finally free! life awaits me,
its mysteries new to my newborn
eyes. I have walked through the
darkness and madness of my own
broken mind and survived.

at last, I have Arrived...



Arrival

"Yes at Last, at Last, to be Free of the Past,
and now the future beckons me."- Jimmy Somerville

February 6th 2001, I was sitting on the floor of the painting studio making a mindless watercolour of Beanie when someone asked what day it was. February 6th? I hadn't thought about what day it was in two weeks. I hadn't been aware of how long the winter was, or how long it would be before the equinox would salvage what had survived. It was at this moment that it dawned on me: I was free.

The first week on Paxil had been filled with tremors, sleep, and more sleep, but once it passed, I felt it, a fresh breath of air filtering into my stale tomb. I had the urge to open my eyes and See the world again, a world that a short while ago had been a dark tunnel with no end. For the first time in nearly six months, I felt a person inside me, a person that liked Things and did Stuff. I suddenly had more emotions than the default Sad and Panic, ones that were dusty with years of neglect, like Boredom. I discovered Boredom while sitting in the shuttle bus several days later, had been unable to exist because all available space in my mind had been taken over by the virus. Now it was delightfully empty. My

◀ If you can't read it, it says:
Free. Finally free! Life awaits me,
Its mysteries new to my newborn eyes. I have walked
through the Darkness and madness of my own Broken mind
and survived.

At last, I have Arrived.

THE VIKING ARCADE PROJECTS
ECCENTRICITY

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dose of Paxil seems to increase every six months, which tells me that under the floorboards the monster still lurks. But I am on the high ground now, watching ever vigilant. I am enjoying my place here in the sun, for now I am Alive, 20 years in the making.

Fun Fact:

When MSU learned of what had happened, they awarded me the Carpe Diem Alumni Scholarship for continuing education in the face of extreme adversity.

It was worth \$1,000.
Montclair State rulez.

Second Edition Notes:

This is where I would have liked to say my life became stable. I would finish school, get a job, get an apartment, and become a full fledged Eccentric complete with a couch fort and telescope.

But then again, Life had its own agenda...



▲ Fast times at Montclair State and beyond.

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The Runway

Preparing for Take-off

My journey through hell complete, I went about taking everything I had learned and began making this manifesto. It was my senior year in college, the great home stretch, time to pull everything together and jump into the future. It was a golden age indeed. This included that wonderfully heady frenzy that proceeds any great trip into the unknown. For me it was the chaos of actually getting this book finished, printed, and following an ancient rite of passage; *Getting the University to Let You Graduate*.

It's thought that one simply finishes their requirements and the school lets you graduate but this is a misconception created to lull people into a false sense of security. In order to actually graduate, you have to beat the school in a relentless game of mental chess and prove that you would be able to survive in the bureaucratic wilds.

They tried no less than four times to knock me off the grad list, using missing credits, miss-allocated credits, a missing major, and at one point an ancient library fine, none of which they would warn you of. Each time I was sent on a wild round of paperwork that had to be accomplished by deadlines often in a matter of hours. Madness reigned and

it was wonderful, like a drug. I don't believe I have ever been so consistently drunk on anticipation.

I had a wicked professor closing in for the kill but in the end, in the very end when I took that last spring into space, I knew she couldn't touch me anymore. No professor could touch me anymore.

Unfortunate events had left me more or less a drifter but who cared? I had this Book. I had a small pile of awards in my car. I was at the top. Now that I had graduated with honors and much recognition, I was going to complete the circle by moving into my own apartment and become a full-fledged Eccentric. There would be my own window, my own telly, my telescope, even a greenhouse. I would fill the refrigerator with my own foods and I would have a lock on my door.

With nothing left to lose and a brilliant future all but assured to me, I ran to the edge and leapt, leapt out with joyful abandon.

Into the worst economy in seventy years.

◀ Wheeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!

ECCENTRICITY

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Failed Attempt

Jumping into Nothing

Graduation left me homeless once more (as I had fairly well been living in the computer lab) but I didn't figure on being homeless for long. I mean, finding a supporting wage couldn't be too hard, not with the burst of fanfare I had emerged from as a resume. Even if I could just barely grasp the concept of the word "professional", I was sure I could get by on talent. I wasn't worried.

And time passed.

And it passed some more.

As Summer burned into its full glory I had yet to get a response from a single employer and fear began to creep in through the cracks. While I was at school I had no time to absorb the idea that all my belongings were gone, but now I had all the time in the world. I kept wanting to read things, use things, wear things that had always been there and been mine, but couldn't. It really messes with your mind. I told myself that all I needed was a job, any job, and it would all be okay. It would be soon, it had to be soon...

On my second or third month of unemployment I was watching "The Daily Show" on Comedy Central. They were in the middle of a "correspondence piece" with Rob Courdry. "Ah graduation. That magical time when you trade one of these, for one of these." he said as his graduation cap changed into a fast food server's paper hat. He then threw the paper hat in the garbage, adding, "Or it would be, except that Wendy's currently isn't hiring right now." He went on to report on employment opportunities in the sex trade.

If the situation had entered into mainstream comedy that could only mean that it was pandemic. There really were no jobs, and if there were no jobs, there would be no home. A deep sense of failure and desolation replaced any excitement I had left from graduation and as Summer slowly drifted by without promise, I was forced to surrender to a grim reality.

Life would have to wait.

Nothing ahead and nothing behind, I became Adrift.

'Whump'. I think that word accurately describes this picture. Or splat, but I like "whump" better. ➤

THE ORIGINAL MENTAL HEALTH PROJECT
ECCENTRICITY



Nomad

Life Without a Home in the Age of Hopelessness

Many people are quick to point out that I was never *truly* homeless, that technically I could go live at my parent's house, but then again technically you can drink saltwater in small amounts and still survive. Several tragedies had taken place and the atmosphere was too unstable. No one is to blame, I was just too sick to stay there.

In a choice between life and shelter, I opted for the street. I lived like that for a month, from September to October of 2003. I don't think I ever really slept on the street because I usually managed to talk Beanie into letting me crash on her couch. It was around this time that I finally managed to get a job working in a tiny camera store doing restorations, but it didn't pay a sustaining wage. I knew I was horribly underpaid for what I was doing, but my boss couldn't afford to pay more.

Towards the end of October I went on a pilgrimage to Point Pleasant to collect my mind. It wasn't the true Holylands of Wildwood, that would have taken far too much time and money, but it would do in a fix. It was warm that day. Summer was giving its last gasp before succumbing to Winter. I remember that long walk on the beach so well...

I was lost, so very, very lost.

On the way home the bus stopped a town before mine and declared it to be the end of the line. Apparently I hadn't checked the schedule close enough. I remember wondering how I was going to get home, then realizing I had nowhere to go. The bus driver left me on a corner, stranded and alone.

Eventually I got to Beanie's via another bus, but the damage had been done. Any lingering illusions about my situation being temporary were gone. I was truly homeless. Beanie decided to let me live with her after she discovered I would rather sleep in my car than go home at night. I lived on her couch, any clothes I could carry out of the house now resided in a Tupperware container behind it, and most of my most immediately needed possessions were packed into my car.

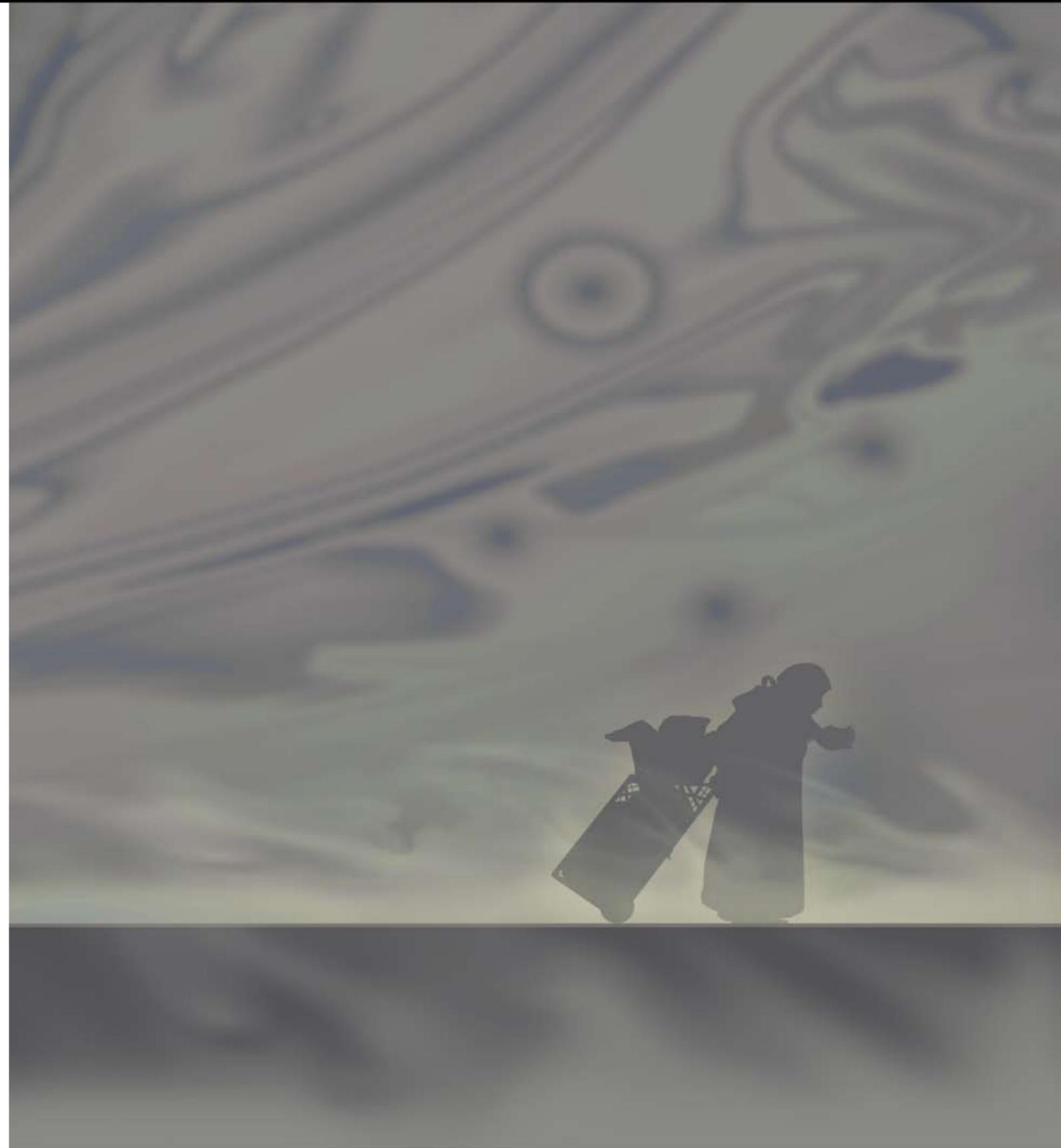
The landlord of her building looked the other way to my squatting because I had tended the apartment's gardens during my summer of unemployment, another one of my Missions from better days. When he passed on, miraculously I was allowed to continue my stay.

As Fall turned into Winter, it was like the Eternal Grey all over again.

I hadn't given up just yet. In fact, I came up with a new hare-brained scheme to get a job just about every week.

I wrapped up my life and carried it with me to ward off the bitter cold sting of desolation. It helped at first, but eventually it only served as a reminder, a shabby grey mass of missing pieces that weighs you down as you go. ➤

THE ORIGINAL SIN PROJECT
ECCENTRICITY





Nomad

By January I saved up \$1,200 to put myself back into the design scene by taking continuing education classes at the School of Visual Arts. I worked nine to five, six days a week, then took the bus to NYC four of those nights to attend school. It was the only thing keeping me going.

The inadvertent side-effect of going to SVA was being thrown into the glorious burst of confusion that was commuting to New York City at night. Every night I would slip into the current and let it carry me. It was bitterly cold and the Winter filled whatever nooks and crannies it could find, but the city fought back with a continual stream of activity and movement. It was an ideal hiding place for a nomad like me. No one notices that you don't belong. No one notices, but no one cares either. This was a city of humans with lives and jobs. Those of them that could not fit the mold fell by the wayside, the detritus of society, forever lost.

What if I couldn't find a way to fit? There were hundreds, thousands of normal, professional people competing for each job out on the market. They had corporate habits and manners, normal clothes, professional portfolios and resumes. I saw them everywhere, going to bars, going on dates, drinking at Starbucks with clients. It was a world so far apart from me, one I, for the life of me, will never be able to understand.

I had talent and skills, but I didn't have it, that essence of the everyday man. All my life I was in school, a place where you didn't necessarily fit in, but you couldn't be easily thrown out. In the real world it was done all the time. There were more than enough round pegs for those coveted round holes. At best I was a novelty item in mainstream America. There was no need for me.

I still had my job at Photo Cullen, though. I had just begun wondering if I supplemented my meager pay with a second job as a janitor if I could afford a place to live when an agency returned my call. Even after all this time I was still

putting in resumes for jobs, albeit in a mindless routine sort of way. I met with them in early April where they told me they had a job opening for a designer at a firm in Soho. I was rushed across town to meet with their creative director, who said they would hire me on a temp to perm basis if I could start the day after.

I said yes.

The next day I told my boss at Photo Cullen that I had to leave on very short notice. I hated to do it, especially after all he did for me, but I was desperate. He understood, and oddly enough, someone came into the store looking for a job later that day. She was hired. I went to my new job for two days, then was told that my supervisor would be away shooting a commercial for the next week. I was to get a call when my new boss came back, telling me when I could come in to continue my temp period.

I never heard from him again.

After two weeks of desperate calling I found out that they had hired someone else and hadn't bothered to call. The agency who placed me apologized profusely and promised me another job, a position as a designer for Marlboro cigarettes. I may have had lost everything, but I still had morals.

I quit the working world.

Second Edition Notes:

I often refer to this period as 'The Great Divide' or 'The War' when referring to possessions I lost. Example, 'That book was lost in the war.' 'I lost that picture to/in the great divide.'

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Restoration

Which took far longer than anyone would have guessed

Which is of course exactly why I was hired by Mayer/Berkshire shortly after. Figures.

I had sent out the resume some time before my ship sank and frankly I had forgotten all about it. This created a very unexpected problem.

I had a job but by now it was too late. The damage that the Nomad year caused was so severe that I no longer wanted to work in the design field. To be honest, at the time I got the call from M/B I was beginning to think of other things nonprofessional types could do for a living, like being a truck driver or a dominatrix. I crack myself up with that last one... but no, seriously, I was signing up for workshops.

Then suddenly Nomad was over. All logic said I should be overjoyed, but I found I was no longer interested. It was like trying to attach a limb thought lost to a healed stump. Beanie forced me to go to my new job but I was terribly shell-shocked. Though I wouldn't say Mayer/Berkshire is corporate, it was still a far cry from the more unconventional jobs I'd had. As far as corporate culture is concerned, I'm hopelessly awkward. I was so afraid of miss-stepping that I skipped my lunch breaks to hide by my desk and didn't talk to anyone for months. Emotional progress was painfully slow, but with the job came the fantastic possibility of getting an apartment. Finally I could let go of the dead weight I had been carrying with me for so long as a vagabond.

Which created yet another very unexpected problem.

There were a lot of emotions that swirled around when I finally got a home, but the most unexpected one was pain. With every piece of my life that I reclaimed from those cardboard boxes I felt something akin to being kicked in the stomach. The Nomad years had been hard, but I had no idea how much hurt had been locked away until the boxes began to open. The event that I had waited so long for as being a grand release became a hollow, bitter, and torturous rite of reclamation.

And then Winter came.

I had been living in the apartment for three months by the time it did, but the darkness of the Nomad era was still clinging to me. By February I began to panic. The fact that I was still depressed, despite having accomplished the last step in my master plan for salvation, was enough to drive me to edge several times. I even called the suicide hot line, which I'll tell you was not very helpful.

Putting myself back together after the Nomad era took nearly a year, a whole year more than I thought it would. The memories continue to hang around the edges of my mind like pond scum, but that's okay.

The Rift has returned.

Seriously, that's what it looked like. I was orange and everything else was white. I felt like I had just come in from a storm and now all was quiet. I just dropped everything and stared.



THE RESTORATION PROJECT
ECCENTRICITY





17

The Jubilation

Everything comes together

It took nearly a frigging year for the system to check itself and realize that Nomad was over. A frigging year! FRIG! It was April 4th, 2005 when my brain suddenly realized that I had a job, a home, and that my depression was going into remission. Then it proceeded to announce this to me as if it were breaking news. The result was something like electrocution, except good. It wasn't just a change in the mind, but the entire body, like a warm summer wind gusting through cobwebs. I began to trip.

It's probably no coincidence that Daylight Savings had been the day before (one of the holiest days in the Spacilalist calender). In fact, it fuels a theory I'm working on that a good portion of my brain actually shuts down for the winter, making it impossible to

register change in the environment. It's probably a defense mechanism to keep Winter stimulus out, but in this case it ended up making things worse. I'm not sure whether I'll need it this year or not, but I am choosing not to think about it at the moment.

Winter can wait.

The Jubilation was actually very beautiful. Everything had fixed itself over the Winter, everything from Nomad that is. When Spring returned on April 6th, it burst through a newly built maze of brilliant reconstruction, relishing its own existence within this pristine system. They rolled off each other, reveling the other's ability to amplify its own magnificence. It moved at such a speed that to stop it now would cause indescribable horrors. No worry though. It would take something stronger than the disease, far crueler than Winter to stop a force such as this.

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Shot in the Back of the Head

And then the Unthinkable Happened

The first shot wasn't personal and I had warning.

Not much, but some.

The Holylands had been destroyed.

The land that had been locked in time for nearly 40 years had finally been discovered by land developers and they had consumed it voraciously. The land was pocked with the shells of disemboweled temples and empty lots in ruin. The ocean was not concerned, thank goodness and continued to throw out its energy with abandon. It was the only place that was safe. I never thought that the Holylands would change though I don't know why I never thought it would. It seemed permanent, the foundation of my scattered existence, the only connection I had to my childhood, the dream-world, whatever planet I belonged to, whatever place I was

eventually destined for. It was the only place when everything came back into phase and I was whole. Suddenly those strings were disconnecting and there was nothing that could be done but let it wash away. I returned home from the 2005 pilgrimage completely out of sorts, only to greet another shot as it smashed into the side of my skull.

My great-grandmother died.

My great-grandmother was humanity's hope for eternal life. She was going to forge it from the void of mortal impossibility with sheer will alone and she was succeeding, until reality got wise. Of course it is ridiculous to believe that one can live forever, and I doubt I ever really believed she was doing it, but my subconscious had other ideas. So long as Great-grandmother lived (and she lived like normal people, not half passed on at a nursing home),

then no one in our family could die, or at least the possibility for immortality would continue to exist. All hope of that is now lost.

Now all that was left was the Now. The past was becoming erased with the Holylands and the future was no longer protected by my great-grandmother's crusade on the ultimate destiny. All I had now was what I could gather Here in my hands. I had gathered a lot, actually, a home, a job, a life that I could reasonably sustain. It was an accomplishment that seemed impossible to achieve for so much of my life, but it was here. It was.

Until Mayer/Berkshire fired the final shot deep into my brainstem.

And terminated me.

◀ I never saw it coming. So much, suddenly deleted. Suddenly...lost.

ECCENTRICITY



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State of Change

Learning and Accepting Life's Ultimate Truth

Thus I slowly learned the most essential lesson of all. Everything Changes. I hate change. I've always hated change. I have spent good chunks of my life trying to find a safe patch of land to call my own and defend it to the death. The last thing I wanted to do was have to search for another when this one had taken so long to secure. If it had taken so much effort to capture this fort, then losing it must surely be a sign that my attempt at life had been roundly defeated. If it was over then, shouldn't I now die? Why wasn't I dead? Was there something else I was missing?

So far as I had known to this point, life was about obtaining a specific goal and keeping it. If that goal no longer existed, was it possible to...change the goal? In fact, could I change the path completely? Did I have to follow the original path at all? Once I woke up from my injuries and found that I wasn't dead, I realized that I could go back to the center and set a new route. All I had to do was continue to remain alive and Time would eventually take me somewhere. In fact, I could go where I thought I could never return.

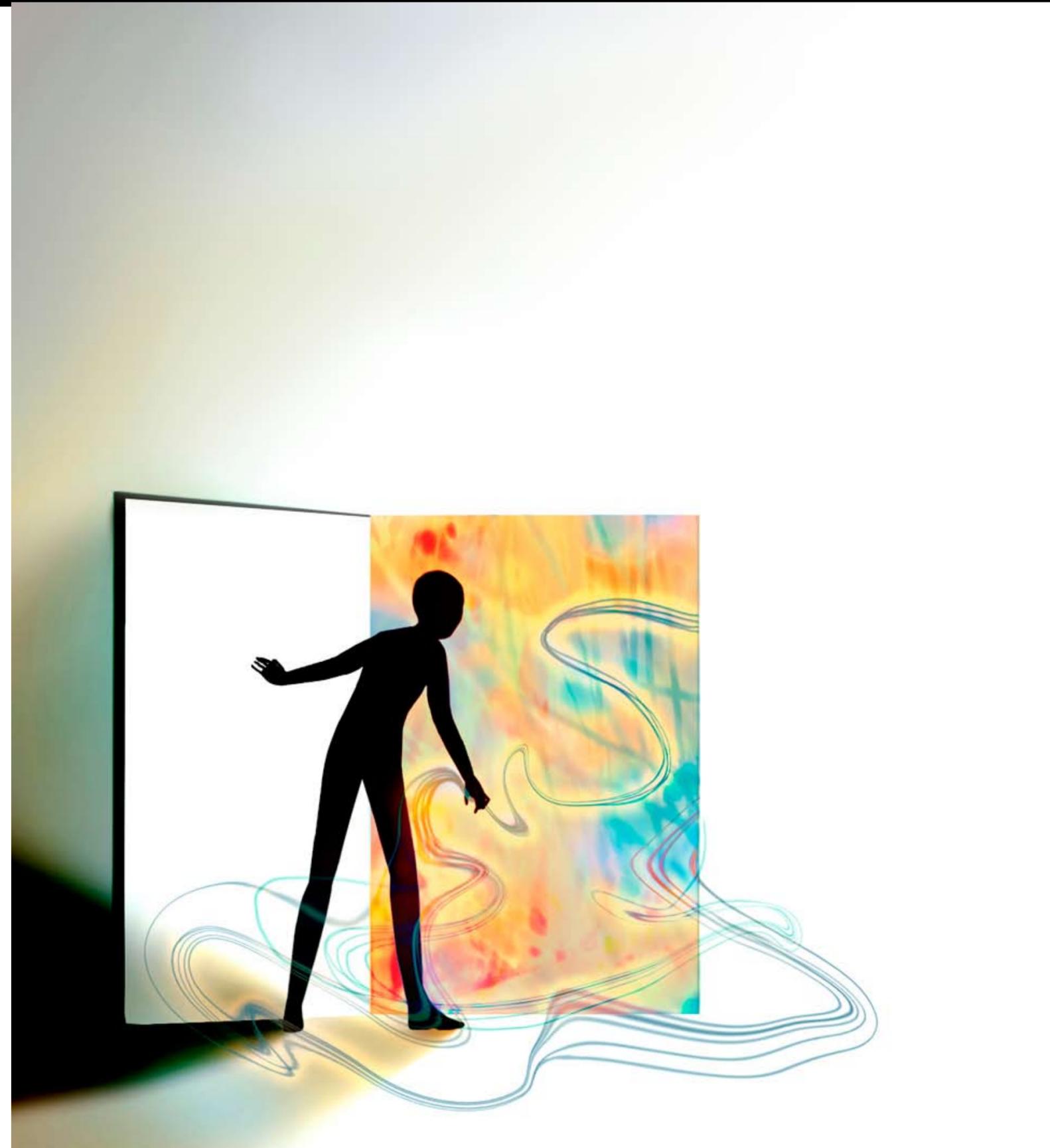
I could return to Eccentricity.

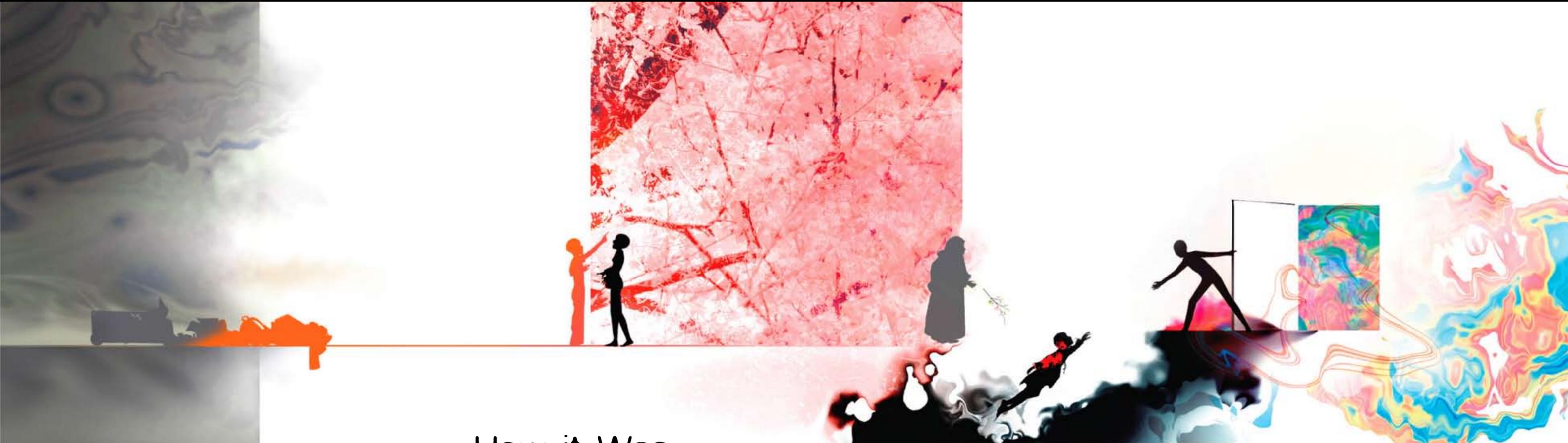
I should never have left, by god! I had begun to believe that my other half could not support me, but what if it could? I had been fired because I was different. My most valiant effort to hide and control it had been in vain; for the Mayers, after pretending for so long that they had accepted my handicaps, had actually never done so at all. It was time to face a Fact; I was Different and so my life would have to be Different. Instead of hiding and taming the wildness, I would now harness it. How could I have been so blind as to believe that because fire can destroy things that that was the only thing it was capable of doing? Fire was powerful. Fire was energy. Fire could be used to fuel civilizations that could not exist without it.

I would harness my demons, and this time they would pull the cart.

Returning to the Source. ➤

THE ALTERNATIVE BEING PRODUCTIONS
ECCENTRICITY





How it Was

What came Before what happened Next

The truth is, I finished this book in 2003, or so I thought. Time has continued to pass as I add more and more, so I've been writing new eras for this section as they happened. The problem with that is that the past several chapters are lacking the benefit of hindsight and it's finally caught up with me. So before we proceed forward, I will tell you how it was as I know it now.

When I graduated it rested in the back of my mind that I was about to embark on a new experiment; to see if something like me to exist in the working world. As Nomad came into full bloom I had begun to feel that

this crucial trial had failed, meaning I could not fit in the world of Man. The consequences would be dire for sure, but before that door opened I was picked up by Mayer/Berkshire.

I did not count it a success just yet. Phase two would now begin; could I handle the day to day life in the human system? I put a lot of weight on this, for after all, I could pretend to be anyone at the interview. Could I actually survive through the hidden dangers that would make themselves known over and over for weeks, months or even years? I didn't figure I'd last a year. Nomad had stripped me of whatever confidence I'd had, making Restoration as slow

and painful as it was, but Berkshire was a heaven. I told them early on the risks of hiring me, that I was out of sync, that I didn't understand much about corporate society, that the Winter would likely be disastrous when it came, that I couldn't handle wearing shoes, ect. I was daring them to fire me then. I gave them every excuse to within my first month to see just how safe I was. The response was amazingly positive, overwhelmingly positive. The Mayers told me that they had been searching for an eccentric because they believed they made the best work and encouraged me to change nothing. I could wear what I wanted, deck out

my desk in as many Christmas lights I could find and sleep on the lawn during my breaks. In return for their kindness I gave them my best. I completed projects they had dreamed of setting in motion years ago but had no talent to pull them off. Tapping my gift, they expanded their advertising venues with flyers, branding, packaging, post cards, store displays, catalogues, new product photography and a constant revamping of the website to name a few.

And they loved me.

Lucky catch! Lucky break! I couldn't be more lucky that these people would overlook my oddities and frailties because they liked me and my work. I

knew I would be able to work if I could just outweigh my weirdness with my talent. The experiment was a success!

And then Winter came. It was the most savage, brutal Winter I had ever faced, and I went down fast. As I began to deteriorate, Doc. Rika (best doctor in the world) became alarmed and called Bob Mayer, my boss, early January. She asked him to let me telecommute a day or two a week to lessen the strain. He politely refused. As the weeks went by Bob was his usual friendly self, when he was there. As I began to lose ground, he was on a two week honeymoon in Thailand, then headed off to sunny California. In a bid to save myself, I

self launched a project to recreate the Mayer's Berkshire Legwear catalogue. I would have talked to my friend Mike, who also suffered from depression, but after a long struggle to continue working, he went under. He had tried to save himself by changing his duties from the isolation of the packing room to another job where he would be with people. The number one rule of surviving depression is to never let it get you alone. But once again Bob politely refused and Mike eventually stopped coming to work. Now he was gone, leaving me alone as well. There was something unsettling about seeing a comrade shot down in battle when

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Job Post
 Anie's graphic design skills are... takes direction very well. In addition, Anie has a good understanding of websites/tasks and requires little to no explanation regarding file sizes, formats, up... locations, etc. Anie is very creative and often develops excellent ideas.

Anie is an excellent employee provided that she is in good spirits. From time to time, especially in the winter months Anie is in bad spirits and she is very unproductive. Although this is rare, it is a serious problem that needs to be addressed. Anie and I will discuss the possibility of an unpaid (if she has no vacation time left) week off this winter...

MAYER/BERKSHIRE
 Dear Anie:
 This letter will confirm the termination of your employment at the Mayer/Berkshire Corporation, effective July 12, 2005.

As I explained to you on the 12th of July, it has become apparent that you are unhappy working here... And for that reason I felt that it was best to end our employment relationship.

I began my employment on June 9, 2005, in the position of Graphic Artist. I was diagnosed with... year 1989, 2001, 2003, 2004 and 2005. At the time of... I did not inform my employer about my disabilities and was able to perform my duties without... For an accommodation... Sometime in November 2004, I informed my Supervisor Mr. Robert (Bo) Mayer, that the onset of Winter would negatively affect my disability. I requested an accommodation temporary tele-commuting arrangement to work at home for at least two days a week. My request was denied. After that period, I was singled out and subjected to harassment from Mr. Mayer. On February 2005, I met with Mr. Mayer and provided information about my disability. He rejected my doctor's quest over the telephone. During that meeting I became ill due to my disability. Following that meeting, we had several discussions about my disability and accommodations. The results were not successful. I continued to perform my duties to the best of my ability and generated satisfactory work products. On June 9, 2005, my performance evaluation was conducted by Mr. Bob Mayer. Several comments noted were, "Anie is an excellent employee", "overall Anie has made a good contribution to the department" and "I am happy with her performance". Shortly after that period, I inquired to Mr. Mayer about obtaining an employee handbook. Mr. Mayer took issue with me pursuing this matter. On July 12, 2005, I met with Mr. Michael Mayer, Executive Vice President. He stated, "...it has become apparent that you are unhappy working here, and for that reason I felt that it was best to end our relationship". As a result, my employment was terminated.

I believe that I have been discriminated against in violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended.

If this charge filed with both the EEOC and the State or local Agency, if any. I will advise the agencies if I change my address or phone number and I will cooperate fully with them in the processing of my charge in accordance with their procedures.

How it Was

you knew it didn't have to happen and that while you are still in the air, you could very well be next. Losing Mike gave me a strange sense of survivor guilt for being able to last when he couldn't. But I was making it. I was still working, even though I was now too sick to go out and get my medicine. Getting my medicine would mean going Out into the Winter and I kept putting it off until the withdrawal symptoms pushed me to the edge. I resumed with a higher dose but I continued to slide downhill. By mid February I put my plea in again for some kind of accommodation for the illness, Americans with Disabilities Act in hand, but was turned down again. How could I expect to get special treatment when no one else did? That wasn't how the world of Man worked. You either found a way to fit or you dropped out. I didn't know if I could do it anymore. But Bob promised me that if I just kept coming to work every day, I would have a job. So long as I could continue to walk out into the crushing Winter for one more month then the experiment would succeed.

So I pushed hard. Then the Jubilation came, Spring came, and I knew I had made it. I beat the Winter and I was still in the world of Man! Thanks to Bob and all the others at MB for giving me this chance, thanks to the luck that I found them, thanks to the talent that outweighed my illness and thanks that they wanted me despite it. Things were going to be okay. At last, at long last I was one of you.

And then one warm summer afternoon, they threw me away. Gone. Gone, gone, gone. After the suicide attempt and I came home from the hospital, after the doctors said it was safe for me to be alone, after all my efforts to find out the truth behind why it had happened all failed, I entered a State of Change. I stopped trying to live in the System and began



Team Justice for the Autistic Kid, led by Professor Jonathan Hyman and two students from the Constitutional Litigation Clinic of Rutgers University.

to figure out ways to live off it instead. But there was also this profound rage that developed against Berkshire for wantonly destroying everything I had, after I had trusted them so deeply. I needed to funnel it into something useful lest it burn me to the ground, so I filed a complaint of discrimination with the EEOC. The god-slayer in me awoke and I pulled the entire case together myself. I'd had the wits to ask for a performance review a month before the mysterious firing and under pressure it was provided; flawless. Except for one thing;

'Anie is an excellent employee provided she is in good spirits. From time to time, especially in the winter months Anie is in bad spirits and she is very unproductive.'

I had argued it at the time, citing the many things I had done over the Winter to stay sane, including the Master catalogue. I was brushed away and I let it slide. Then when I was fired I asked for the reason in writing which was;

'...it has become apparent that you are unhappy working here... And for that reason I felt that it was best to end our employment relationship.'

They further cemented this claim when I got Unemployment insurance. Because I was fired, UI called the Mayers asking for a reason. They asked them if I had broken any laws or policies, to which they had said no and stated the same reason above. UI then asked if I had ever said I was unhappy and they replied no again. UI pressed them for an explanation but they wouldn't budge. Seeing no good reason not to, I was granted UI benefits and the Mayers sealed their reason in federal stone.

In at-will working states, a person can be legally fired for not liking the same baseball team as you do, but you can't fire someone for being disabled. EEOC saw reason enough to grant my complaint as a valid case but asked that I try mediation first. I really didn't want to. I was prepared to run MB into the ground no matter how long it took. After all, I had nothing left to lose. But the rage had grown to such a height that I feared it would spill out in a way that would give MB the chance to hit me with a harassment suit. In Mediation you can say anything you want and it's all sworn to secrecy. Short of threats of bodily harm, I was free to return Bob the favour of making life a living hell. But I wasn't an idiot. No doubt they would bring their attorneys and ruin everything. I needed lawyers, free ones.

In New Jersey you can get law students to try your case for free, so long as they are chaperoned by a professor who has passed the bar. The odds of getting them are slim, but I had the right case at the right time and so I got two students and one professor. Bob, on the other hand, underestimated me entirely and came alone. I may not be able to breath a word of what went on once the door closed for the Mediation session, but I can tell you what happened before and after, and while it is my opinion and not based on any fact what so ever, he was scared.

I hadn't been prepared to settle and I hadn't wanted to, but between my lawyers and Beanie I was pushed into agreeing to, well, I can't say. You'll have to imagine in your head. And so at 5 p.m., November 7th, State of Change ended.



20 Disabled

Broken in the Land of Crystal Mirrors

While all this was happening, something far more serious was transpiring beneath the surface, causing a new era to start before the last one had ended. They coexisted for a short time until that defining moment signaled SoC's end, leaving me to face a new and unsettling reality.

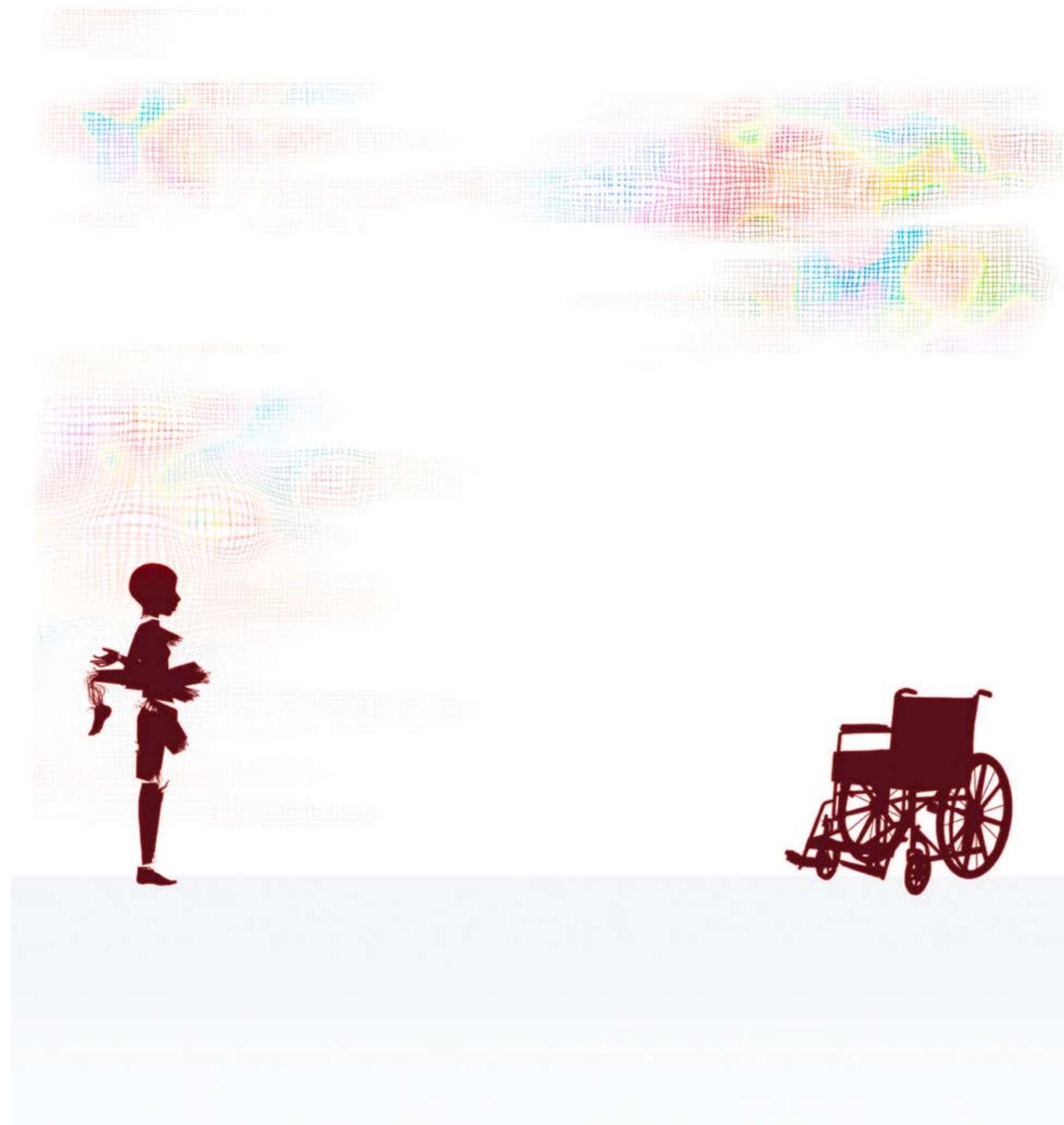
I was disabled, truly for real. Several months before my final confrontation with Bob, I was merely unemployed. In early September I picked up a job filling in for a designer at ASN broadcasting. When I came in the first day, however, I noticed something strange. I had only been there for ten minutes when what had seemed to be customary nervousness began to give way to something else. Within a few hours the tremors began. Then came the spasms. And then it broke into Fear. Pure fear. Nothing was happening, nothing was going wrong but slowly a little voice in the back of my head was making itself heard. 'Need to get out. Need to get out!'

Why was this happening? Could Berkshire have left wounds this deep? It must have progressed over the Summer, but how could so much damage have happened without me even knowing? I was determined not to go down without a fight and stayed for the rest of the day, but by seven p.m. I was so delirious that I spent a good two minutes pushing on a Pull door, desperate to escape. That night I rallied the troops for another go, but that morning my entire body seized up in spasms. My brain was determined to do what it had to to keep itself out of a situation it feared. There would be no going back. I must have spent all my life wondering if I could ever be like regular people and that day it was answered. I think I knew it all along but I was afraid of what that would mean. Now I had no choice. After getting over the initial shock (and strangely enough, relief) of accepting my new disabled status, I filed for Social Security. What was worse, my agoraphobia (fear of being places

you can't easily leave, fear of leaving the house) had exploded, drastically limiting where I could go and how long I could stay out without getting another episode. I had a grand total of two places I could go; home/Beanie's apt or, oddly enough, my old college campus. Everything else had a time limit of about an hour unless I was with Beanie.

I picked up a part-time job at the campus with the intention of using the extra money to keep my apartment but I couldn't even do that. Even my attempt to work from home failed as it became clear that I was afraid to work under anybody. In the end I had to let my apartment go. Beanie rescued me once again and dropped her apartment too, then grabbed a bigger one down the hall for both of us, on the condition that I settled in the EEOC mediation. SoC ended and when Unemployment learned I could no longer work, they cut me off. There was nothing left now but Winter.

THE FUTURE IS NOW
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Liberation

Free at Last

In the pre-dawn darkness of the months preceding, a new life had been forged, one free of the pain that I had endured my entire life. For the first time ever I slept the Winter away. I slept up to eighteen hours at a time and my days were filled with rampant, glorious boredom. Am I lazy? Mayhaps, although my compulsiveness leads to marathon bouts of housecleaning. I don't watch all that much TV but I do spend a good amount of time at my computer. I began to draw and write again, and my fantasy world Realspace entered a time of plenty, one it hadn't seen in years.

But as Spring came into view, a new threat was looming. My savings were drying up, and after almost half a year, I had still not heard from Social Security. By the time May came around I was in full panic. I couldn't go back, but I had to. I began to look for simple jobs like shelf stocking, but most jobs required shifts of at least four hours, three hours more than I could handle being outside the house. As my bank account dwindled to a few hundred dollars, I actually went for an interview at the local Target, where I was turned down. I didn't have enough money to make it one more month.

And then, May 19th, 2006, Social Security called. It was over. I was officially free.

So here I am!

I no longer work or seek work outside little odd jobs, and so I am liberated from social constraints and the crippling fear it brings. In fact, I'm beginning to wonder if pursuing a life in the working world was distracting me from what I was supposed to be doing all along, which is this. Almost all my ailments are in remission and I have never been so content and stable in all my life for so long. I even got back together with my Ma! We definitely understand each other better now.

Sometimes I feel guilty about turning my back on the working world, but these results are hard to ignore. I suppose this is what they mean when they say you have to lose it all to find it again.

Cheers to that, mate!

Third edition notes: It has been nearly six years since I wrote this and much has come to pass, but I fear if I pause to illustrate it now I will never finish the book. It as been so long already.



Glorious healing!

THE ECCENTRICITY PROJECT

